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STATE FOR NEA/MAG AND DRL/NESCA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [PINR](#) [MO](#)  
SUBJECT: MR. EL-HIMMA GOES TO PARLIAMENT: AMBASSADOR'S  
CALL ON CHAMBER FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE HEAD FOUAD ALI  
EL-HIMMA

Classified By: Ambassador Thomas T. Riley for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: In a February 13 meeting, prominent parliamentarian and royal confidante Fouad Ali El-Himma discussed with the Ambassador his efforts to better coordinate local, regional and national governance in the poor constituency he represents. El-Himma asserted that Morocco's legislature has "all the legal authority it needs" and complained bitterly about mismanagement of resources and lack of vision among the parliamentary leadership. Interestingly, El-Himma declined to engage on issues like Western Sahara (in which he was intimately engaged as Deputy Interior Minister) and did not even mention his "All Democrats Movement," an initiative which has prompted clamorous speculation in the domestic media about his political ambitions. End summary.

12. (C) The Ambassador met on February 13 with Fouad Ali El-Himma, Chairman of Parliament's Foreign Affairs, Islamic Affairs, and Defense Committee. El Himma is also leader of the parliamentary bloc with provides lynch-pin support to Prime Minister El-Fassi's minority government. The former Deputy Interior Minister and childhood friend and confidante of King Mohammed VI, is still commonly viewed as perhaps the most influential person in Morocco, after the monarch. In a 90-minute, one-on-one meeting, El-Himma talked at length about his efforts to help Skhour Rhamna, the poor constituency north of Marrakech he was elected to represent in September 2007. El-Himma said he had been leading a continuing dialogue between local officials, NGOs, and private sector leaders to discuss ways to attract investment, generate employment, and upgrade economic development activities in the district.

13. (C) El-Himma claimed that Skhour Rhamna was the poorest district in Morocco and lamented that it had not been selected as a beneficiary for Millennium Challenge Account projects, the first of which are being launched in early 12008. El-Himma urged that the USG look closely at Skhour Rhamna as it planned future assistance activities, pledging that he would make sure the USG received the full cooperation of all levels of the GOM in such an endeavor. If you invest in Skhour Rhamna, "we will give you your success story," he asserted. One potential asset he mentioned was the air base at Ben Guerir, the former NASA alternate landing site.

14. (C) Asked about his perspective as a new parliamentarian, El-Himma complained bitterly about the mismanagement of staff

resources at the institution. Upon arrival, El-Himma discovered, to his dismay, that he could not hire even one staff member of his own choosing. Parliament's entire human resources budget was already tapped out, with 600 persons on the staff payroll, of whom "maybe 30 or 40 actually do something," he complained. He directly criticized former lower house speaker Abdelouahed Radi (now Minister of Justice) for having allocated jobs as political party favors and paybacks rather than on merit. El-Himma also clearly implied that his relations with Radi's successor, speaker Mustapha Mansouri, were chilly. (Comment: We had heard this from independent sources.)

¶5. (C) El-Himma challenged the widely held view that parliament was a weak institution because its powers were circumscribed by the constitution. The existing legal framework provides all the power it needs to effect change, he argued. The problem has been the myopic vision of the political parties in the parliament, he contended. If parliament got together and presented effective legislation based on strong consensus, the GOM could not and would not say no, he argued.

¶6. (C) Returning to the theme of helping his district, El-Himma told the Ambassador he had decided to step down from his post as Minister-Delegate for the Interior (i.e. Deputy Minister) to go back to a quieter life in his home town and focus on his family and his community. Once there, he decided he needed not to rest but to work hard to improve his community, concluding that he could best do so by representing his district in parliament.

¶7. (C) Comment: As Deputy Minister of the Interior from 2002 to the summer of 2007, he overshadowed the actual Minister (Chakib Benmoussa) and was widely considered, mainly

because of his proximity to the King, to be the second most influential man in Morocco. Many still believe this is the case. It is hard not to think him disingenuous in claiming that he stepped down from his ministerial post in the summer of 2007, not to enter parliament but to return to his dusty and rural hometown to spend time with his family.

¶8. (C) Comment continued: Perhaps most significant in the conversation was what El-Himma did not say. He ignored the Ambassador's question on Western Sahara, an issue on which he worked in the Interior Ministry and as a leader of numerous diplomatic missions to press Morocco's case in world capitals and the first Manhasset meeting. El-Himma also declined to say anything about his leadership of the "All Democrats Movement" (reftel), an initiative which has provoked clamorous speculation in the domestic media about his possible plans to form a new political party that would seem well placed to steamroll its rivals and transform the political landscape. Instead, with the Ambassador, El-Himma clung to his pose as a newly minted parliamentarian who has come to the capital determined to do something good for his district.

¶9. (C) Comment continued: This is doubtful, at least in part. El-Himma's proximity to the King has apparently not been diminished. In fact, we have heard that he was called to join the King on his early February skiing vacation in France. We think more plausible the commonly held view that El-Himma has been tasked by the King with going into parliament, seeing why it doesn't work well, and ultimately fixing it. Perhaps by forming a dominant new party, or perhaps through more indirect approaches. We are reminded of the 1980 Robert Redford film "Brubaker," in which the newly appointed warden enters a corrupt and brutal prison disguised as an inmate, to see for himself what the problems are from the ground level. El-Himma watching will continue to be a major sport for observers of Morocco's domestic political scene and will likely yield interesting results in the months to come. End comment.

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